

A Repeat of Journey

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Summary: Camilla Macaulay was a Caucasian beauty before she died-maybe-and being reborn as one Haruno Sakura. Or does Camilla only dreamed about being Sakura? Or is it Sakura who is being put in a ridiculous genjutsu?

1. Chapter 1: Starting Point

Dear Readers, I apologize in advance if there's a lot of grammar or vocabulary error in this work, because I am not a native English speaker.

This work is not perfect, of course, and your help and advice is much appreciated to help me better this story.

Note: This is kind of a Self-Insert story, and the background OC, Camilla Macaulay, is inspired by a character of the same name from the novel The Secret History by Donna Tartt.

DISCLAIMER: I don't own Naruto

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><p>Chapter One</p>

Starting Point

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><p>Part 1: Prologue

He wore a Rabbit's smile

Twisting a golden pocket watch

No shadow below his feet

I searched them wherever he goes

* * *

><p>I never think people actually know what their first memory is.</p>

I used to ask Ino, Shikamaru and Choji if they remember what's being a baby feels like because I can't remember ever being one. Ino said being a baby is gross, and Choji thinks he wouldn't like it because babies can't eat things that he likes, like that potato chips he always bring with him. Shikamaru didn't even bother to reply.

"But do you actually think you've been that small?" I asked Ino impatiently, pointing at a civilian woman who was holding her baby as we were playing in the swing.

"Does it matter? I'm already this big, anyway. And the baby me is definitely not that ugly." Ino puffed, flicking her blonde hair back.

I nodded, pushing myself higher on the swing. It's true; Ino is pretty, with light blonde hair and blue eyes. I met her on the first day I went to the Academy. She saw me fighting off bullies and called on her friends to help me. After that she wouldn't leave me alone and drag two of her childhood friends, Shikamaru and Choji and pester me everywhere.

Ino thinks I am cute, with my short pink hair and wispy bangs and large forehead. She always told me she envied my large green eyes, because she said hers look cold and unexpressive. But Ino didn't know that I wasn't always a green-eyed little girl.

It's true, because even when I can't remember my first memory as Sakura Haruno, I remember my sixteen years life as a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl named Camilla Macaulay.

I used to like reading novels and playing guitar. I remember my older brother, Henry, used to teach me to play guitar when I was eleven. My father is a military official and a high ranking one at that so he was very strict and doesn't show emotion that well. He teaches me and my siblingsâ€"older brother, Henry and younger brother, Richardâ€"various method of self-defense and strategy.

I don't remember how I died and being born again. I asked my mother, Mebuki Haruno, if I was a weird baby. She laughed and said I was the easiest baby ever because I sleep all the time and rarely cries, and that she doesn't know if she should be worried or grateful because of that.

She said that one time, when I was still months old, I sleep for eighteen hours without waking up to feed; she and my father brought me to Konoha Hospital. The doctors couldn't find anything wrong with my body or the reason why I sleep all the time because I was perfectly healthy, not lacking nutrients, and my flow of chakra, though faint as infants should, was normal. She jokes that maybe I used to have such a tiring life before I ended up in her stomach, that's why her nine month pregnancy went so smoothly. Since that time, she often stay beside me when I'm asleep, counting the hour,

then wake me up to feed me herself.

My parents here are Mebuki and Kizashi Haruno and both of them are chuunin level ninja. Kizashi isn't home often, but Mebuki is almost always home, teaching me in taijutsu because she said it was the only thing that made her chuunin. She was quite surprised with my hand-to-hand combat abilities and exclaimed happily that it must have come from her. I was kind of proud to make her happy so I made it my priority to train especially hard in taijutsu.

That is before I went to the Academy and learn about confusing things like genjutsu and clans.

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><p>Part 2: Uzumaki Naruto

He might be a lost genie

Or just a lonesome stranger

Leaving an enchanted lamp

Or a cursed home in faraway land

* * *

><p>It was not a peaceful day in Konoha. In the morning, a classmate of mine, whose name is Uzumaki Naruto skipped class and creates a ruckus on the streets. I always thought Naruto to be only slightly funny and more annoying. He is sulky but loud and attention seeking and also rude to strangers. I may not be the best example of treating people but at least I only bite after they bark. Naruto bark all the time to all kinds of people that he caught staring at him. Well, he does, except if it's me.</p>

For some reason, he seemed to have a crush on me, the same way Ino have a crush on Uchiha Sasuke and that kind of bothered me.

This morning he paint the Hokage monuments funny faces.

I was in class, studying, when a loud commotion is heard from the outside. Since Iruka-sensei quickly ran outside, the whole students follow him, grateful for a free-time. We were all swarming up to the rooftop to see Naruto, with his funny goggles and obnoxious shirt, holding a brush, hanging in front of the ridiculous Hokage monuments, tied by a rope.

When he sees us, he grinned.

"None of you guys could do something this horrible, but I can! I am incredible!" He yelled.

I admit it is brave of him, but totally stupid.

"GET DOWN HERE YOU MORON!"

And that is Iruka-sensei, ready to blow.

Of course he's but a hanging fish, an easy prey for any decent

ninja.

In class, I can see why Naruto is hated. He's disrespectful to everyone and often creates trouble for the other friends. He often made Iruka-sensei mad and it made him suck at teaching us, doing unexpected tests and all.

Outside the Academy though, I can hardly understand why people ostracized him the way they do. Sure, he's a loud brat, but he's still a kid. What makes him different than the rest of us, bratty kids?

In my former life, girls said nasty thing or gossips about me like it was some sort of way to make themselves feel better, sometimes it was because of Henry, or because I was pretty or rich and snobbish, one time it was because I was smart. But as I observed Naruto, I found that people hated him for absolutely no reason at all. People everywhere, mothers in the part, sales in the marketplace, and even some non-teacher staff at school, all treat Naruto like he was a born trash.

I was really shocked. I meanâ€"weren't he close to the freakin' Sandaime? Why aren't these people afraid that Naruto would tell on them?

I ponder about the annoying enigma that is Uzumaki Naruto for a while. I figured maybe I should ask the Hokage about it, because it really confused me as to why they treat him like something evil, except if he's done something horrible beforeâ€" but Naruto's still a kid. I mean, I have more potential to be doing horrible things more than him.

Surely he couldn't have done anything worse than cause a disaster in the marketplace that made him deserves to be alienated like that?

"â€"don't you know who the Hokage are?"

Wait, isn't that Iruka-sensei' voice?

"Of course!â€" "and that's Naruto'sâ€" "basically, those that receive the Hokage name are the strongest ninjas in the village, right?"

Well, that's a flawed theory, if I ever heard one.

"â€"and then I'm going to surpass all the previous Hokages!" Naruto exclaimed with his chopsticks, grinning wildly, "and then, and then! I'll make the village recognize my strength!"

I thought Naruto was at odds with Iruka-sensei but apparently, seeing them bickering like this is like seeing me and Kizashi.

It's good though, I thought Naruto must be pretty lonely so this ease my feelings a little bit.

Tomorrow's the graduation test after all.

* * *

><p>Part 3: Uchiha Sasuke

A strange town this is

Nobody noticed him in his suit

Or the book he carried everywhere

That contains all magic secrets

* * *

><p>I woke up late on the team assembling day and met Ino on the way.</p>

"Hey, Sakura, hurry up! Race me to the class, 'kay?"

I ran passed her, then looked back at her shocked face, grinning.

"Morning to you, Ino, are you okay with losing?"

"Hey!" She popped a vein, running at top speed to catch up to me.
"What's that Sakura, you cheater!"

It was a good start.

And Ino losses, too. Of course I cheat a start, but it's fun.

In class, Ino create a ruckus for wanting the seat next to Uchiha Sasuke and Naruto doubled the chaos when he and Sasuke do a lip-lock.

Well, it's accidental, but I know the two of them enough to assume that it was their first kiss they're giving.

Naruto is obnoxious and he kind of has a crush on me, and I wouldn't want to kiss these kids anyway so I guess he couldn't have had his first kiss. And Sasukeâ€"well, he's entirely different. It's strange that Ino likes him but it's kind of not. He's easily the most attractive guy in our year, and at the top of the class, too, but no actually, I am the top of class, he's just better at fighting than I do. But I beat him once in a taijutsu spar. Then he proceeds to glare at me the remainder of the day, seething in class. And Naruto also kind of likes me after that, too. Honestly, if I were to be simple, I'd say, he's a jerk.

Really, if Naruto's a brat, Sasuke's a jerk.

I didn't know much about him, though, so it's not right for me to judge, but beingâ€|objectiveâ€|he really do treated us poorlyâ€"us being everybody in sight.

I was never that curious about him because he doesn't bother me, but Ino once told me about the Uchiha clan. Apparently they were famous and powerful, according to Ino. But they were also consists of pompous, stick up their asses pricks, according to Yamanaka Inoichi, Ino's dad. And apparently, according to the people on streets, they were massacred by their own heir, leaving only one survivor, the murderer's brother, which, evidently, is Sasuke.

I think I may understand his broodiness a little.

I know it is highly arrogant of me to say this; but I pity them. Naruto and Sasuke.

Everyone has their own shits, yes, but I can't help but feel kind of uneasy with them. I'm quite an accomplished actress, though, and I tend not to feel pity when I'm into the interaction, as long as I don't let my mind wonder by itself.

It doesn't matter though, it's not as if we'll be close friends soon, I mean Sasuke can continue be a loner and Naruto can pester me all he likes. I'm quite okay with Ino, Choji and Shikamaru, and Naruto, too, I guess.

I sat with Shikamaru and Choji at the back, and then Ino came and squeeze herself in.

"Choji, make a place for me, yeah? Move to Shikamaru a bit."

Shikamaru sighed his "Troublesome woman," and then slump back into his in-class-sleeping-position.

I almost fell asleep too because Iruka-sensei take such a long time before calling my name.

I was in team seven.

With Uzumaki Narutoâ€"

â€"and Uchiha Sasuke.

* * *

><p>Part 4: Hatake Kakashi

He talks in strange accents

But ones I've heard before

Once he let slips

Someday he'll bring me home

* * *

><p>I ate lunch with team tenâ€"that is Ino, Shikamaru and Chojiâ€"at break before each team was supposed to be meeting their jounin sensei.<p>

I sighed for the fifth time and then Ino snapped.

"Oh come on Sakura! I'd happily trade these two bums with your team if I could! Well, not Naruto, I'd prefer if it's only Sasuke-kun and I, but you're certainly more than welcome, Sakuraâ€"but anyway!" She said, exasperated, "What I mean is! Well! It's not like we wouldn't be able to eat lunches like this anymore! Orâ€"or that we'll be going on different missions that probably mean we wouldn't be able to meet

up because of our different scheduleâ€"I meanâ€|"

That makes it better, seriouslyâ€|

"Stop it, Ino," , "Don't say it like that
Ino,"

"Shikamaru~~Choji~~Wahhhhâ€" I sulked. They get to be together more
and I'm the only one that gets separated.

"Heh, troublesome," Shikamaru sat up.

Choji smiled at me apologetically, "what Ino and Shikamaru mean is
that we wouldn't just forget about you even if you're busy with your
team."

Yeahâ€"my new team kind of weird, though. Just an hour ago, the two
males of my team were engaged in an accidental lip-lock. Both of them
are kind of socially retarded and I'm not that good at making friends
either. One is the survivor of a massacre and one's the village
pariah who also kind of has a crush on me and hates the other one
with guts. If I get a shitty teacher, I'd curse the sky.

I did curse the sky.

The stupid teacher was late.

Scratch that, I wasn't even sure he will come at all.

There's only our team left since freakin' two hours ago.

I turn to Sasuke and Naruto. "I'm going to kill him." I said in all
seriousness.

Of courseâ€"Ino get the cool sensei and I get the inconsiderate
prick. And she complained that she got an old man as a sensei, but at
least he's a cool old man!

I continue to PMS-ing inside my head until our jounin sensei finally
came and made a fool of himself falling for one of Naruto's obvious
prank.

"I don't like you guys," he said, smiling crinkly eyed stupid smile.
Well, yeah, flash news, old man, I don't like you either.

* * *

><p>Part 5: Team Seven

Dark suit and a gentleman hat

He looked far from the homeless man

That I thought he was

Since I look into his eyes

* * *

><p>"Okay," he begins with the same

you-cute-little-genin-should-worship-me-or-something
smile.<p>

"Let's begin with some introductions. Things like dreams for the future, hobbies. Stuff like that."

Naruto looked dubious at that.

"Hey, hey, why don't you introduce yourself to us first?"

I added nastily, "yeah, _you _look suspicious."

I mean, he does look suspicious. He wear the usual flak jacket and jounin attire, yes, but he also wear a piece of dark cloth as a mask and his forehead protector is obscuring his left eye, so basically we only get to see his right eye instead of a face.

And it's such a scary eye, tooâ€|

It looksâ€|so lazy.

It's kind of half open and apathetic.

He looks funny for a jounin.

"Ohhâ€| me? My name is Hatake Kakashi. I have no desire to tell you guys about my likes and dislikes. Dreams for the futureâ€|? Hmmâ€| Well, I have lots of hobbiesâ€|"

Insert an awkward silence. Even Naruto has no comments on _that_ introduction.

Hatake Kakashi's expression not changing.

"Now, it's your turn, from the right."

Naruto turns energetic all of a sudden.

"My name's Uzumaki Naruto! I like Cup Ramen!"â€|"what a simple guyâ€|"What I like even more is the ramen restaurant Iruka-sensei buys me."â€|"Ichiraku'sâ€|"What I dislike is waiting three minutes for the cup ramen to cook"â€|"does his brain has anything besides ramen?â€|"My dream is to be Hokage!" He fixed his forehead protector, "And thenâ€|have all the people of this village acknowledge my existence!"

"Hobbiesâ€|Pranks, I guess."

Hatake Kakashi sweat dropped a little.

"Next."

Sasuke is next, and he looks all emo.

"My name is Uchiha Sasuke. There are a lot of things I dislike and I don't particularly like anything."â€|"prickâ€|"Andâ€| I don't want to use the word 'dream' butâ€| I have an ambition. The resurrection of my clan andâ€| to kill a certain man."

It became eerily quiet after that. Kakashi-senseiâ€|"yeah, I probably

should start calling him that nowâ€"looks like he already expected it and Naruto looks frightened.

I think I can guess who he wants to kill and the feelings of pity washed over me.

"Hey! I'm Haruno Sakura," I blurted out.

"Okay, well, I like reading, and playing. I love this village, this world, so my dreamâ€"it's not really a dream, but I want to be able to take care of thisâ€|world, I guess. The things that I dislike are anything that puts me in a situation I don't like."

"Okay!" Kakashi-sensei said, all crinkly eyed smile again, "We'll start our duties tomorrow!"

He gives us details of our dutiesâ€"survival training test against himselfâ€"in printouts.

Apparently we can't eat breakfast if we don't want to throw up.

I'll just eat it earlier than usual then.

* * *

><p>Part 6: Teamwork

He wore a rabbit's smile

And dark suit and a gentleman hat

And kept his promise

Though long gone he was now

* * *

><p>I woke up extra early the next day, took a bath and put on my training attire, long, fittingâ€"but not tight, light green shirt and forest green bike shorts and my black forehead protector used as a belt. I load my pouches with each different kind of weapons I've learned to utilize. And then I went downstairs to eat breakfast because really, breakfast is important. My old school used to have this strict school breakfast program drilled into our routine. And I sleep extra early after the usual workout, so it's okay to wake up a little bit early.<p>

And truthfully, I don't even need to wake up early, because Kakashi-sensei was late. For almost three hours.

THANK GOD I ATE BREAKFAST, JERK!

"Hey, guys, good morning!"

"YOU'RE LATE!", "IT'S ALMOST FREAKIN' NOON!", "HN!"

We were told to gather the glade at the center of the third training ground at eight o'clock and he freakin' showed up at eleven.

The inconsiderate prick set up a clock on a tree stump located in the

middle of the other two stumps.

"Okay, here are two bells."

I look up at him.

"Your task is to take these from me before noon."

I sent him my nastiest glare. _Why don't you showed up sooner then?_

Kakashi-sensei continued despite my scary face, "Those who cannot get a bell by noonâ€|get no lunch. I'll not only tie you to one of those stumps but I'll eat right in front of you."

Yeah, inconsiderate and a sadist.

"You only need to get one bell. There are only two, so one of you will definitely be tied to a stump."â€"Oh shit, I'd have to get competitiveâ€"Andâ€|the person who doesn't take a bell fails."

Eerie silence.

"So at least one of you will be sent back to the Academy."

Icy cold silence.

Isn't this supposed to be a three men cell with a jounin instructor?

"You have to come at me with the intention of killing me. You can use any weapon, shuriken, kunaiâ€|"

Naruto seems to be even more on edge than me.

"Yeah! You're so slow you can't even dodge an eraser,"â€"good point, but he's a jounin, something's up on his sleevesâ€"we'll kill you!" Naruto laughed.

Kakashi-sensei' eyelid dropped even lower than normal.

"Those who have no talents, usually bark the loudest, Mr. Dead lastâ€!"

That hits a home.

Naruto assume a fighting stanceâ€"a flawed oneâ€"and draw his kunai, I'd say at least he has the intent of hurting Kakashi-senseiâ€"but said man has already gone from his position five meters in front to Naruto's back before I have the chance to blink. His left hand on Naruto's head, holding him in position. The other one is on Naruto's right hand, pinning his kunai to his neck.

"Slow down, I haven't say start yet."

I gulped slowly. _Do I really have a chance to take the bell?_

"It seems like you're prepared to come to me with the intent to kill. So you've finally acknowledge me?"

And then he chuckled lightly, "seems like I'm beginning to like you guys."

Okay, pretend it's a life and death situation. Just kill him. He won't die.

I hope I won't either.

"START!"

I speed away from the clearing into the dense wood at the left. This way, it'll be harder for Kakashi-sensei to target me and it will enable me to spy on him. Safety is the first priority.

Kakashi-sensei was looking at the forest on his right and left. When he turned to his right, suddenly the hair of my neck stands.

_He knows where I am. _

Though it's lucky there's Naruto. He'll be a little busy for a while.

Now, what have I learned?

Aside from slightly above average taijutsu, mediocre ninjutsu, dispersing genjutsuâ€|

Well, there are math, geography, and strategy, I supposeâ€|

I look over to Kakashi and Naruto, who's only like a plaything for Kakashi-sensei.

There's simply no way the three of us can beat that guy if he's on the clearing. I'd have to lure him into the forest.

Even then, I'm still at a disadvantage. Surprising him is the only way.

Taijutsu is definitely out of the question, well, maybe if we could gang up on himâ€|but we'd have to coordinate our attack, maybe Sasuke can use his clan ninjutsu, and if I could make him focus on meâ€"thank goodness I bring my full arsenal of weaponsâ€"and Narutoâ€"he's decent at taijutsu, at least?â€"andâ€"shit! Then who gets the bell?

Sasuke's definitely a must on the plan. Andâ€"

â€"me?

But Naruto's my friend, more than Sasukeâ€|

Can I just do it with Naruto?â€"no way, looking at how he is nowâ€|

Can we just threaten him into passing the three of us once we get the bell?

â€"DOES HE WANT TO BURN NARUTO FROM THE BACK?!

"NARUTO, get out of there! You're going to get killed!"

And then Kakashi-sensei ass-poke him hard, and with style, too.

I quickly abandon my position, determined to save Naruto firstâ€"who's underwaterâ€"then lure Kakashi into the woods while searching for Sasuke.

Before I ran out to the clearing from Kakashi's behind, Naruto jump out of the water with eight freakin' clonesâ€"and not just clones, but shadow clonesâ€"and I stopped. Part jealous and part in awe.

_This totally feels like I'll be the one who fails. Well, I suppose it's okay if one of team ten fails, tooâ€| _I'm not a good friend, I know.

I decided to abandon Naruto's fight for a bit and start thinking about my other option.

If I were to think badly of Sasuke, I suppose he wouldn't accept my work together proposal, he'd go for Naruto if he saw his jutsu just now. So that leaves me with Naruto.

I turned back to spying on Naruto and Kakashi, who until now has shown no opening at all.

Naruto's trapped hanging upside down from a tree, being lectured by Kakashi.

Okayâ€"so, I'll just help him a bitâ€"

â€"or notâ€"Sasuke did that. He got shurikens at Kakashiâ€"but he turned out to be a logâ€"that's kawarimi no jutsu.

And then the hair on my back standsâ€|

I turned around to Kakashi's freakish face.

I did an uppercut and jump to the nearest tree branch.

Okay, so it's going to be a taijutsu. At least I'm still in the forest.

I pulled out my Kunai blade and jumping down, aiming to strike at the backâ€"he dodged it, of courseâ€"but I already went down and use my leg to tackle him, he fellâ€"I secretly pulled out an explosive tag from my waist pouchâ€"and I strike his left hand with my kunai blade.

"Aim to kill, Sakura," Kakashi said, breathing down my neck from the back.

I dodged down and free myself from Kakashiâ€"making a hand sealâ€"Snakeâ€"Kakashi's eyes widen a small fractionâ€"and the tag detonated.

I flee at top speed into the clearing where Naruto is.

And there he isâ€"stealing our lunches.

"Are you sure you want to save him, Sakura?"

Shit, he's fast.

I tried to do a low roundhouse kick, but he already jumped away.

I pulled out five shurikens at him.

"Naruto! Help me!"

"Sakura-chan!"

I did a taijutsu fight with Kakashi for a while with the help of three Naruto, but I still can't find an opening.

At least he's no longer reading his book.

We'd have to flee and find Sasuke.

"Trying to explode me into ashes again, Sakura?"

The bastard.

"Naruto!"

"Yes!"

I grabbed Naruto's hand andâ€" "RUN!"â€"into the forest on the right side.

We met Sasuke's head along the way.

"GYAAHHHHH!"

That's not me. Honest.

After me and Naruto recovered from our shockâ€"which takes a whileâ€"we helped Sasuke get out from the ground.

Not that he actually needed help that much.

"So, I'd say we work together!" I blurted.

Naruto and Sasuke look at me.

"Why do we have to work together with this teme? We'd do fine just the two of us, Sakura-chan!"

"And who gets the bell then? I already managed to touch it; I'll get it next time."

"YOU TOUCHED IT?!" both me and Naruto yelled.

I quickly regain my composure, "well, you'll get it with our help AND," I said, silencing both of them, "we'll threaten him into passing the three of us together."

Silenceâ€|

"That's a stupid plan coming from you,"

"What do you say, TEME?!"

"Shut up dope!"

"TEME!"

"DOPE!"

"TEMÈ" "I karate chopped him on the head.

Sasuke made a restrained 'Pft' soundâ€"I am quite surprisedâ€" "Sasuke, you shut up, too!"

And then Kakashi's in front of us and the alarmâ€"signing the noonâ€"rings.

The cute-genins-are-below-me smile is back on his face.

We are all herded to the three stumps and tied on each of themâ€"I'm in the middle, really feels like the girlâ€"Kakashi sensei open our lunchboxes and placed them in front of us.

I'm actually quite hungry, it's lunch time after all, but if Naruto and Sasuke really did eat nothing, they must be _starving_.

"You're a sadistâ€|" I said sullenly, making his expression seems more mirthful than before. _Ugh._

"Don't say that, her, I'll untie you Sakura," then I'm free.

I am one hundred percent sure Kakashi sensei have a serious mental problem.

"Here, you can eatâ€|" He pushed one lunchbox to me.

Naruto's mouth and I hang open in shock. Sasuke's seething.

"You're a freakin' sadist, Kakashi-sensei, now untie me too!"

What Kakashi sensei said next with a voice as cold as I ever heard him speakingâ€"which isn't much, but stillâ€"really freak me out. It probably bring horror to Naruto and Sasuke though.

"You twoâ€| should just quit being a ninja."

Yeah, I can't possibly touch my food after that.

How can I? Naruto and Sasuke are looking at me like I'mâ€|their dead lover or something. And what does this mean anyway? Did Kakashi untie me because I'm a girl? Does this means I pass the test? But I didn't get the bellâ€| Sasuke's the one who touched it at all.

Does Kakashi only want me to feel uncomfortable emotionally? He's a sadist, so it's possible.

"What do you mean quit as ninja?!" Naruto barked while Sasuke sent him his nastiest glare.

"You're just a punk,"

They looked almost murderous at that remark.

"Why do you think you were divided into teams? Why do you think we were doing this test?"

"You're just a fresh genin; you think you can defeat a full-fledged jounin by yourself? Do you still not realize the answer to this test?"

Suddenly, it dawned on me. "You pitted us against each other with those bells! You want to test ourâ€" "what? Un-selfishness? Love of self-sacrifice?

Kakashi looked at the three of us, but I think he's actually speaking to Sasuke louder, "it's teamwork." He said finally.

"Sakura realized the advantage of working together, but hesitate to act upon it and Naruto; you were only running around by yourself."

"Sasuke," his tone's getting darker, "you just assumed the others would get in your way and tried to do everything by yourself. These arrogant individualistic ideals can put your comrades and the mission in danger and even get you killed."

"Being a ninja means you will be risking your lives on duties," He lets go of Sasuke and walked to a polished rectangular stone meters away.

"Look at this these names carved on this stone. These are the names of the ninjas who are recognized as heroes of the village."

Somehow the dark mood didn't seem to faze Naruto.

His ears perk at the mention of the word 'heroes'

"Hey, hey, hey, hey! I've decided to get my name carved on that stone too! A hero! That's what I'll become!"

It is a moment I almost hate Naruto for his cluelessness.

"They aren't just normal heroesâ€|"

"Yeah?! What kind are they?"

"Narutoâ€| this is sadâ€|

"They are all heroes who died while on duty."

Kakashi turned to us. "You guys, I'll give you one more chance. Sakura, untie Sasuke, you both can eat your lunches, but don't give any to Naruto. It's his punishment for trying to eat by himself."

"If anyone gives him food, they will fail immediately." Then, he left.

I still haven't touched my food after a while when Naruto's stomach gives away his state of starvation.

Sasuke's act to it almost shocked me to death.

"Here." He said suddenly, handing on his lunch to Naruto.

"Don't, I've had breakfast this morning. Naruto, you can eat mine." I said suddenly.

"Sakura-chan! teme!"

Naruto chuckled happily, "thanks,"

It was approximately three seconds before what appear like an explosion detonated only five meters ahead of us.

Naruto and I screamed.

It's Kakashi.

"YOU GUYS!"

I screamed bloody murder. It was Sasuke's idea! KIND OF!

"PASS!"

"Huh?", "What?", "hmp,"

Kakashi is all smiles again. "You guys are the first. Everyone else would just do whatever I told them. They were all morons." "but I thought about just doing whatever you told us to do" "a ninja must see underneath the underneath."

"Those who break the rules and codes of the ninja world are called trash; but those who don't take care of their comrades are worse than trash."

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><p>Rate and Review, please!

2. Chapter 2: Builder

DISCLAIMER: I don't own Naruto

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><p>Chapter Two<p>

Builder

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><p>Part 1: The Bridge Builder

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><p>Today is not a normal day.</p>

Well, for one, I got up late. Not that it matters, with a teacher like Kakashi-sensei.

And alsoâ€"today's D-rank mission is especially annoying.

We're retrieving a cat with a ribbon on the left ear named Tora. Kakashi even has his own opinion on the cat. Said it's going to be soon before we'll meet him again. I know after seeing his owner, Fire Country Lord's wife Madam Shijimi, that 'soon' is not an overstatement.

Our next missions are supposed to be like this: Babysitting an elder's grandsonâ€"yesterday, it's babysitting a working mother's baby daughterâ€"shopping in the neighboring village, and help with the potato diggingâ€"which we already did, too, it's the harvest season, apparently.

Yeah, this is what D-rank missions are like. Truthfully I don't think I ever want to be a Jounin instructor, imagine how torturous it'd be. I feel sad for team ten's senseiâ€|dragging Shikamaru and Choji must be difficult. It's good that there's Ino. No one can push them around like Ino.

But really, being a jounin instructor is a pain, I think.

Kakashi's an exception, though.

He revels in our complaints. He's a sadist. And he has this unsightly book no one should dare read in public that he read everywhere.

He probably enjoys D-ranks like this.

But Naruto flat out, disrespectlyâ€"not that I complainâ€"and loudly refused the old manâ€"I mean the Sandaime.

I always thought Naruto has a close relationship with the Sandaime, and yeah, that seems to be the case.

We got a protection mission. C-rank. The Hokage's calling the clientâ€"who's turned out to be a drunk ossanâ€"old manâ€"who claimed to be an expert bridge builder. The meeting didn't turn out well, but it did establish that I'm the tallest of the groupâ€"excluding Kakashi of course.

I ran home and load my backpack with spare clothes and weapons and first aid kitâ€"and off we go.

The journey from the village gate is full of idle chatter, especially on Naruto and Tazuna-san part. Tazuna being the old bridge builder.

Naruto and Tazuna walk up front with Sasuke's leading, while I positioned myself beside Kakashi at the back.

"Sensei, wave country doesn't have their own ninjas, right?"

"Yep, so there won't be any ninja combat in this mission." He laughed, ruffling my head. He has made a habit of ruffling or petting

me. It leaves my bangs in a mess, which annoys me a little.

He urges me to ask Tazuna-san at the front more about the mission, but I somehow feel like Kakashi sensei just wanted to get rid of me.

And then he freakin' got chained and died in pieces.

The attackers are two seemingly look-alikes males from Mistâ€"Kirigakure. They use coordinated attack strategy using their twin metal gauntlets connected by shuriken chain.

They went for Naruto, but Sasuke's quick to actâ€"he uses his shuriken to neutralized their connecting chain to a tree and did an impressive jump and kick to both their faces. I aim four kunai at their legs, just to be safe, and pulled out my kunai blade and positioned myself beside Tazuna.

The two mist ninjas recovered quickly from their fallâ€"but their legs are bloodyâ€"and release their shuriken chain and aim for individual attackâ€"their movements are not that fast anymore.

But apparently both of them went to get meâ€"or the bridge builder, possibly.

I readied my stance, pulling out two kunai. In the last moment I will tackle Tazuna and dodge down, and then I'll aim for their torsoâ€"the plan's a fluke now that Sasuke's in front of meâ€"thanks, but seriouslyâ€"it's not that I'm stronger than himâ€"then Kakashi-sensei appeared and save the day.

The two mist ninjas already in his hands like dead oversized dolls.

I feel relief wash over me.

"Sasuke, Sakura, good job."

I'm proud but I also think Kakashi aimed our compliments to be a wake up jab for Naruto, who's only freezing the moment the enemy attack. I don't know why I always think of Kakashi as always having an ulterior motive. Probably because of 'underneath the underneath' thing he said.

We chained the two mist attacker to a tree. Kakashi said they are Kirigakure Chunins and that he found out about their plan the moment we passed a puddle on our wayâ€"I didn't even realize there's a puddle.

"On a sunny day like this when it hasn't rained in days, there's not going to be a puddle." He explained.

"If I had wanted to I could have killed these two instantly,"â€"a fact that somehow surprised me when it shouldn't, because Kakashi-sensei's a jounin, no matter how he may not look like one.

"But there's something I needed to find out."

"Who these two were after." Kakashi turned to Tazuna.

"Our mission was simply to protect you from thieves or gangs, but these ninjas are after you, meaning this has now become at least a B-rank mission. This was supposed to be a simple protection mission, but if it was known that ninjas were after you, this mission would have been set as the more expensive B-rank."

Naruto was right. We do have the crapiest missions.

"Well, I'm sure you had a reason, but it causes problems when you lie about the mission. We are now operating outside of our duties and it will become troublesome, because, one of my genins is not ready for these kinds of mission."

Naruto can't stand it.

He looked slightly murderous when he vowed to protect the bridge builderâ€"but he insists on continuing the missionâ€"and we all agreed, for different reasons.

We made it to the Wave village but it seems Naruto and Sasuke's rivalry is getting stupiderâ€"on the Naruto's side. I think he doesn't want Sasuke to be the star of the team the second time, but he nearly killed a rabbit because of it. It's good that I'm a girl. Bittersweet really. They wouldn't realize my little improvements and I think they wouldn't acknowledge me as equal in their eyes very soon.

"Everyone get down!"

I pulled Tazuna and Naruto downâ€"though Naruto is already on the ground, of course, he's a ninjaâ€"only seconds before a giant sword spun past us.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Kakashi-sensei standing up, so I dare to look upâ€"the giant killing sword just now was embedded to the tree in front of us and on its handle, stood a tall man looking down on us with cold sharp eyes.

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><p>Part 2: The Missing Nin

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><p>Even without being told by Kakashi-sensei, I already a hundred percent sure that this man is the real deal, meaning, no matter how clever I devised a plan, he will still beat meâ€"no, it means no matter the situation, if I happen to be in his way, he'll kill me.<p>

"Sharingan Kakashiâ€|the old man is mine."

Kakashi look back at us a bit, still on full alert of the enemy in front. "You guys, protect Tazuna. Do not enter the fight."

I pulled out a kunai blade slowly, moving to Tazuna's front.

"Ahâ€|I already get to see the infamous Sharingan. I'm honored."

Naruto stomped. "Hey, hey! Sharingan, Sharingan! What the hell is that?!"

Sasuke looked disturbed and he answers Naruto's question in a strange voice, "Sharinganâ€|is a dojutsu that gives you the power to read and defeat all types of Gen, Tai, and Ninjutsu. But that's not the only ability the Sharingan hasâ€|"

The tall missing-nin chuckled. "That's not allâ€|what's even scarier is that you can copy your opponent's techniques once you see them."

"Hatake Kakashi, the man who has copied over a hundred jutsuâ€|Copy Ninja Kakashi."

The he jumped away and the mist startsâ€"a dangerous killing intent waved over us almost choked me.

Suddenly he appeared inches behind my backâ€"and I really thought it'd be the endâ€"then Kakashi-sensei appeared mere milliseconds later and pushed all of us away and stab the enemy from behind and got chopped, also from behind.

It turns out both the first missing-nin guy and Kakashi were only clones.

The realâ€"maybeâ€"Kakashi is now holding a kunai to the enemy's throat.

But the enemy's once again a water clone and the realâ€"possibly!â€"one is the one who suddenly appeared behind Kakashi-sensei. He swung his gigantic swordâ€"Kakashi's dodged it down and kicked the man back but also got knocked into the waterâ€"where the missing-nin suddenly appeared and imprisons him in a water prison jutsuâ€"then created another water clone to deal with us.

The clone chuckled lightly. "Wearing forehead protectors and acting like real ninjasâ€|brats, a real ninja is someone who has survived numerous brushes with death."

Then please, let this be the first of manyâ€|

This man is the famous Demon Zabuza, after allâ€|

I grabbed unto Tazuna with my right handâ€"for a split second I questioned whether saving him is really importantâ€"in case I need to transport him. I readied my fighting stance; my left hand is shaking, holding tightly unto my blade.

Zabuza kicked Naruto hard and square in the stomach that he spit bloodâ€"I watched in horrorâ€"but Naruto managed to stand on his feet.

He lungedâ€"an act of unthinkable stupidity and braveryâ€"only to be thrown back to the ground.

I realized how useless I amâ€|I couldn't do anything. I should be able to, I can make a planâ€"I just lackâ€|bravery.

"Old man!" Naruto turned back.

Tazuna doesn't get mad at the name, he chuckled. "Well, I planted this seed myself. I'm not going to say that I desire to live so much that I'd stop you. Keh, sorry guys, but fight as much as you wants."

Sasuke smirked at that. "You hear that?'

Naruto looked up to the tall missing-nin, smirking, "You ready?"

I looked at their backs, the poison green of envy already making its way to my blood. Naruto created so many shadow clones surrounding Zabuza, even after being beaten and cough up blood he still have the guts, and energy and chakra to make this many clones. All of his clones lunged at the demon"but he pushed them back using his gigantic sword, unscratched.

"Sasuke!" Naruto throw something his way, and Sasuke catches it" a fuma shuriken.

Sasuke aimed it at the real enemy holding Kakashi prisoner.

Zabuza catches it but somehow there's two fuma shuriken"it's the shadow shuriken jutsu" a little bit caught off guard, he jumped at the last moment just as the shuriken that went passed him turned into Naruto, who shoot a kunai at him, somehow grazing his cheek, making his water prisoner break.

I feel like I just got punched and hugged at the same time. Somehow Naruto planned all that in the eve of the battle, whereas I usually plan ahead, and he communicated it with Sasuke with just his action. Sasuke understands him, and he trust Sasuke.

Kakashi is in a high level ninjutsu fight with Zabuza, and even if my wounded pride screamed at me to somehow interfere, I know that if I did, I'll only higher the chance of Kakashi-sensei being killed and I'll only make a fool of myself.

No, I should clear my head. I'll just analyze the opponent, and then after this, I'll train as damn hard as I can.

Kakashi-sensei seems to be winning the battle and the missing-nin look perturbed each time Kakashi-sensei said something.

Their arena is really dangerous, water versus water, speed versus speed.

This is a fight to kill and be killed.

It's ironic that I just realized this when just this morning against the two mist chuunin I looked down on Naruto because he's afraid.

Just as Kakashi prepared to finish his blow, two senbon made its way and planted themselves through the missing-nin throat.

From upside, I heard a sweet laugh. "You're right. He's dead."

And Zabuza's body slumped into the ground lifelessly.

* * *

><p>Part 3: Training

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><p>A hunter-nin killed Zabuza, that's what Kakashi-sensei told us. Me and Naruto didn't accept it that easily, and I knew Sasuke too.<p>

Younger than me but stronger than Kakashi-sensei, huhâ€|_

What have I been doing these past twelve years?

_How can I find the answer? _

How can I find that man if stepping outside the village only this far will get me killed?

After the fight, Kakashi-sensei experienced chakra exhaustion because he uses the Sharingan too much. We ended up carrying him like a sack all the way to Tazuna's house.

When he woke up, he told us that Zabuza's alive.

If I'm being my usual self, I'd say something kinky about Kakashi-sensei dreaming of Zabuza, but I understand now, ninja is not an occupation. It's actually a tough decision you'll ended up performing your whole life. You have to be aware of everything, from the puddle, the snow rabbit and the curious hunter-nin.

Naruto act so flabbergasted at his statement. "But you checked and everything! You said he's dead yourself?!"

"It was probably a momentary death."

I nodded. It makes sense. "The boyâ€"the hunter ninâ€"is actually Zabuza's accomplice then?"

"It's definitely a high possibility. He carried off Zabuza and he only used needle as a weapon. It was probable that he didn't come to kill Zabuza, but to save him."

"Okay. Whether or not, he's alive, we have to be prepared."

"You guys will receive training."

If Naruto's secretly happy that Zabuza might be alive, I am un-doubtfully happy that Kakashi-sensei will train me.

Naruto grinned. "Heh, this is fun!"

I couldn't agree more. Tazuna's grandsonâ€"Inari's impolite bratty outburst did nothing to sour my mood, even though brats are usually good at making me pissed.

Turns out it was Kakashi-sensei who bring down my mood a little. He wants us to do chakra control trainingâ€"tree walking.

I clear my throat after he finished explaining to Naruto what chakra is. "Kakashi-sensei, it may seem arrogant for me to say this, but I'm already used to chakra control training, like tree walking and water walking."

He looked up from his book, "Yeah? That's good, Sakura-kun, you can rest."

"Umâ€"do you have anything useful that I can learn? It could be C-rank jutsu that's not too hard?"

"Kakashi-sensei, I needâ€"I have to be useful."

That finally got him to put down his book.

He looked at me for a while and then sighed, petting my head. "Come on, I'll teach you something special Naruto and Sasuke wouldn't be able to do."

I actually think Kakashi-sensei can read minds. "Since you're surprisingly intelligent,"â€"I blushedâ€""and maybe superior in chakra control, I'll teach you Puppet technique."

"It's actually quite simple, but very useful for a tactician mind. You don't have to use puppets; you can use weapons, even people."

"Sakura-kun, try focusing your chakra into your palm." I did as he told.

"Good, now try focusing it only on the tip of your finger."

I tried concentrating on each fingers but I only managed to focus my chakra only to three fingers. It's actually quite hard. But Kakashi-sensei seems to be quite satisfied with it.

He patted my head, making me lose concentration. "You're surprisingly exceptional at chakra control. This will be easy."

He pulled out a kunai and held it in front of me. "Make your chakra like a thread to bind this kunai, this way you can fire multiple weapons at the same time and you can even control it from a far. But for a start, use only one finger."

I managed to do it fast, but it took quite a long time for me to be able to do it with two fingers.

In the evening, I was covered in sweats and I definitely smell bad, my fingertips feels odd, but I managed to do it with six fingers and Naruto and Sasukeâ€"being in a worse condition than I amâ€"managed to reach ten meters.

We all went home side by side, with me in the middle, supporting both Naruto and Sasuke, feeling really content for the first time in a while.

"Ugh, guys, you stink!" Naruto smile sheepishly at that and Sasuke smirk.

"Let's eat our way to sleep, 'ttebayo!"

"Hn."

I think this is maybe the first point I managed to create a real bond with my teammates.

"Thanks you guys, for letting me be the girl." I told them, laughing at their unbelieving expression, suddenly feeling brave and sappy.

Hard work is always worth it.

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><p>Part 4: Haku

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><p>By the seventh day we're in Tazuna's house, Sasuke and Naruto already managed to better his chakra control significantly while I managed to not only use chakra strings but create a short range chakra area and maintain multiple kunai and shuriken in suspension, although Kakashi-sensei said it's pretty much ineffective since my chakra reserve is still small, compared to Sasuke and Naruto, which strangely enough, didn't make me feel shitty at all. Well, since he also trains me to help grow my chakra reserve. And sometimes while I'm at it, I cheer for Naruto and Sasuke and gave them tips.</p>

I begin to really appreciate my team; Naruto, Sasuke and Kakashi-sensei. I decided that I really like them after all. Ino will be shocked hearing that.

I kind of miss them too; Ino, Shikamaru and Choji.

On the eighth day, Naruto slept over and wouldn't wake upâ€"last night, he and Inari have a rather emotional argument and he kind of disappeared after dinner. Kakashi, Sasuke and I went to guard Tazuna on the bridge that day, when Zabuza finally showed himself and confirm our suspicion.

The mist is thickâ€"it's his hidden mist jutsu, after allâ€"and at least eight Zabuza appeared and surrounds us.

Kakashi-sensei looked at me, and I knew what I have to do.

I pulled a fuma shuriken and made it slice through all Zabuza's water clones.

Sasuke looked positively exited seeing the real Zabuza and his hunter-nin boy companion.

This time Kakashi look at Sasuke and nodded.

"That masked boyâ€|I'll fight him." He said.

"Sakura, you'll help him from afar."

I noddedâ€"Tazuna's still a priority after all, and Sasuke's better in combatâ€"though I'm a little bit happy he doesn't seem to mind

having a backup. If only Naruto's hereâ€|

Haku strike first and they battled intensely.

Sasuke never stops surprising me each time he battles and now he seems to occupy Haku's full attention, and Zabuza and Kakashi have also begin their game, whichâ€"really, make it very easy for me to plan little traps here and there.

Kakashi-sensei is absolutely right about chakra strings. It's energy-saving, efficient, and unassuming.

It's also good that both Sasuke and Kakashi leave behind so many weapons on the ground.

"I can't have you underestimating my team by calling them 'brats.' "

"Sasuke is Konoha's number one rookie of the year."

"Sakura's the top kunoichi, too,"

"And the other one isâ€| the loudest ninja in the village." Kakashi deadpanned.

It's good hearing Kakashi-sensei keep a track on our graduation recordâ€"I guess.

The joy didn't last long, though, because Haku has entrapped Sasuke in ice mirrors domeâ€"it's kind of alarming, because Haku's in those mirrors.

I shoot a kunai to one of the mirror, but his hand went outside and blocked it.

I pulled my strings the same time Naruto arrived and knocked Haku off the mirrorâ€"my attacks ended up only making slight cracks on the ice.

This way my long-ranged attack will be useless, but it's good that Naruto's here, he can help Sasuke from the outsideâ€"or not, since he slipped inside, the moronâ€|

Well, looking from the outside point of view as he attacks Naruto and Sasuke, it's clear that it's not a bunshin, because there's only one movement, but he does it with impossible speed, so there must be something elseâ€| those mirrors should have a purpose.

Should I try getting in and use my chakra space and maybe stop him mid attack?

"You can't win against Hakuâ€|"

"Ever since he was a little kid, I taught him all kinds of fighting skills."

"Your brats can't beat him; they don't yet know the pain of being a shinobiâ€| They don't have what's needed to kill."

"I gained a high quality tool for myself, Sharingan Kakashiâ€|unlike

those trashes that follow you around."

I feel my heart turn icy cold words after words. "A high quality tool, huh?" I pulled out my fuma shurikenâ€"then that means you're worse than trash," and aimed at Zabuza, who's looking at me, ready for my attack. Before my shuriken even reach him, I pulled my fingers, chakra strings ready and ten shurikens from the ground fired at him at the same timeâ€"he swing his sword to blocked all of them and when he's done, Kakashi-sensei kick him from below and then disappeared and delivers a hard kick to the torso from the above. Zabuza disperse into water and appeared behind Kakashi, who's also a water clone.

Suddenly I got pushed from behind but I quickly turned around and balanced myselfâ€"never let your enemy have a clear target from behindâ€"turns out it was Kakashi-sensei who pushed me and Tazuna out of the way.

I dragged Tazuna awayâ€"my priority job is to protect him after allâ€"and helped Sasuke, right, I let my emotion get the best of meâ€|

I pulled ten shurikens and aimed at one mirror at the same time using chakra strings and concentrated hard to maintain each threadsâ€"I poised them inches from one mirror and waitedâ€"and then Zabuza appeared behind meâ€"I flipped fast, my concentration dispersed.

I fell, but I managed to stab his leg bloody with my kunai blade that I controlled using my toe, and then Kakashi transport me and Tazuna away.

Zabuza pulled the blade from his bloody legs. I've caught his attention. "You've got some interesting brats, Kakashi."

Suddenly I feel a cold chillâ€"an indescribable scary chakra. I feel terrible.

And then a loud crack was heard from the other side of the bridgeâ€"where Naruto and Sasuke are!â€"Damn this mist! I can't even see Kakashi-sensei.

Other cracking noises were heardâ€"this time from the front, from Kakashi-sensei.

Another strange soundâ€"like murderous chirping birdsâ€"and flashes of blue lightsâ€"and then it stops. It feels strangeâ€"I grabbed Tazuna's hand and walk slowly through the clearing mist, then in front of meâ€"Kakashi's hand pierced through Haku's heart, and Zabuza's shocked face. Red blood splattered everywhere.

I don't know how long I seem to be in a trance. All I see is blurred shapes and all the while, I didn't let go of Tazuna's hand. Until Naruto came in front of me, his expressions at loss, and drag me to where I see Sasuke's body, lying on the ground, unmoving. I let go of Naruto's hand and kneeled there. Naruto left my side but I couldn't look away.

Sasuke's expression in his sleepâ€|is so peaceful.

And then he bloody wakes up and I come around.

"Sâ€"Sakura?" I helped him sit up.

"Hey, welcome back, Sasukeâ€|"

After that, we see Zabuza's dying eyes as he look upon Haku's face and later that day, Naruto told me of their plight and we buried them side by side. It took two weeks for us to recoverâ€"Sasuke and Kakashi mostly, me and Naruto are surprisingly fineâ€"during which I deliberately exhaust my chakra every day to build a bigger chakra reserve.

Two weeks, and finally we went home, to Konohagakure.

3. Chapter 3: Pain and Gain

DISCLAIMER: I don't own Naruto

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><p>Chapter Three</p>

**Pain and Gain
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><p>Part 1: Stronger

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><p>It was that time of the month. You know, a girl's special timeâ€"a time when they should be treated like queen and be free to lash out at any approaching male and not getting crappy missions or caught in awkward silent war between two puberty stricken boys. Their egosâ€"I can no longer stand it.</p>

"Hey guysâ€|"

"Hn?", "Yes, Sakura-chan?"â€"glaring contestâ€"refusing to meet the eyes.

I sighed. "Guys, I'm at that time of the month, so can you please, _ for the love of this village_ "just go back to normal? Justâ€|repress those hormones, okay?"

"I would Sakura-chan, if teme stop being a stuck up prick!"

"You're annoying,
dope."

"TEME!"

"DOPE!"

"TEME!"

"DOPE!"

"TEMÂ€" "KAKA-SENSEI, YOU CAME!" I jump-hug him.

"Maa, it seems like teamwork is suffering these days." You don't sayâ€|

That morning we did some pretty icky missions and then Kaka-sensei left us. Sasuke too. After he left, me and Naruto are joined by this pretty weird rock. "What kind of rock is square with two holes! I see right through that!"

Turns out it is Konohamaruâ€"Sandaime Hokage's grandsonâ€"and his cronies, all whom refers to Naruto as leader. They asked Naruto to play ninja with them. I figured it is best if I leave. I didn't want to know how someone can 'play' being a ninjaâ€| and not to mention; I absolutely must go and see Ino. She'll give me hell if I waited longer than this to show up.

I met team ten at Yakiniku Q. Ino is absolutely pissed at me.

"Sakura! You! You ran off with Sasuke-kun for a whole monthâ€"and I don't worry about you but Sasuke-kun's better be safe!"

â€"insert dramatic poseâ€" "Ino, how could you?! My heart's breaking!"

"You better regret it! I was already going to drag these two and come and save Sasuke-kun, in case you snapped and kidnapped him!"

"Ah, Ino, me and Sasuke-kun are eloping, surely you can understand!"

"You monster!" She glomp at me and I hug her back.

"You pig!"

"Troublesome women."

I finally managed to release all the female woes with Inoâ€"and Shikamaru and Choji, too, because they're so much better at handling teenage girls than Kakashi, Naruto and Sasuke combined.

Talking with Ino does ease off some of my raging hormonesâ€"but then that Kakashi suddenly made us enter the chuunin examâ€"didn't he know how uncomfortable it is fighting in this condition?!

And then at the designated building there's this green spandex freak who suddenly ask me out.

I muster my most frightening glare. "Don't be ridiculous, my boyfriend will be mad hearing that. He's more powerful than all of you."â€"let's pretend it's Kakashi, though, no let's just pretend it's Ino's sensei.

I glare at Naruto and Sasuke's shocked and questioning stare. "Shut up. Let's go to the third floor."

I grabbed both of their hands and fleeâ€"but the green spandex guy caught up to us and challenged Sasuke for a fightâ€"can't it wait until after the chuunin exam?!

"My name's Rock Lee. I want to fight you, Uchiha Sasuke! I want to test my techniques against the famous ninja clan."

"Plus," he looked at me and blinkâ€"oh my bad, it's supposed to be a winkâ€"can't tell at allâ€"and he make this disturbing smooching move and dare compliment me, "you're an angel," and sent this ridiculous pink heart right my wayâ€"highly poisonous, no doubt, flee at sight.

Sasuke look unperturbed by the weird thing though. "Challenging me knowing the Uchiha name, you're a foolâ€|you're about to learn what this name means, thick brows."

Rock Lee smirked, "please."

Sasuke and Rock Lee ready their stance, but Naruto has had enough of being ignored apparentlyâ€"between thick brows wishing to fight Sasuke and sending his love to me.

"Hey Sasuke, I'll take care of thick brows!" he proclaimed.

Before Sasuke can deny, Rock Lee reject him, "who I wish to fight is not you,"â€"big blow to Naruto's egoâ€"It's Uchiha."

Naruto lunged forward anyway. "Damn It! I'm sick of hearing about Sasuke!"

Rock Lee is unexpectedly strongâ€|he wiped the floor with Naruto.

"I'll say thisâ€|you guys cannot defeat me."

"Because right nowâ€|I am the strongest leaf genin."â€"is there any test to get that title or is it self-proclaimed?

"Tch. Sounds fun, I guess I'll do it." Sasuke smirked.

"Guys, we only have thirty minutes, and who knows what kind of testâ€|"

"I'll be done in five minutes."â€"sounds cocky, but Sasuke's stronger than me, so I am in no way to judgeâ€|

Turns out, Rock Lee isâ€"maybeâ€"about ten times faster than Sasukeâ€"I totally have to ask what kind of training he went throughâ€"or the foods he eatsâ€| because it's really shocking and incredible that Rock Lee managed to kick Sasuke in the faceâ€"Ino's gonna be so madâ€"even though he's using Sharinganâ€"is Sharingan not that incredible or is it because Sasuke's not yet Kakashi-sensei's level in his proficiency in using the dojutsu?

I ran to Sasuke's sideâ€"for a second debating whether to ask him if he's alright, but I think he'll be pissed at thatâ€"but then Rock Lee is already behind him, about to do the finishing blowâ€"I slide on my back, planning to just smash him square with my bodyâ€"ugh, I hope he's won't enjoy itâ€"good thing he dodged itâ€"at least he's away from Sasuke.

"That's enough Lee!"

I looked up and saw a giant funny looking turtleâ€"I move a little beside Sasuke, feeling a bit creepy about Rock Lee and the giant turtle conversation.

Naruto also went beside me, his expression puzzled. Sasuke also have this incredulous expression on his face. He must be thinking how the hell he loses to weirdosâ€!

Somehow, a crazier, creepier adult version of Rock Lee appeared in a puff of smoke atop the turtle.

Now, I'm not usually have that very bad opinion about people's style, because I'm kind of individualistic but somehow that choice of attire and his poseâ€"playboy magazine's busty model incredulous alluring poseâ€"are almost impossible not to question.

What kind of chemicals went to his brain?

Like his appearance is not enough weirdâ€"he punched Rock Lee hard in the faceâ€"I thought he's his sensei? Is it how he discipline him?â€"and then they procced to cry and smothered each other with hugs and romantic wordsâ€"which ended in the weird adult declaring Rock Lee's punishment for starting a fight and almost disobeying his rule as to run five hundred laps around the practice rangeâ€"Rock Lee agreed to it ecstatically.

"What's that turtle?!" Naruto askedâ€"this seems to divert the Rock Lee's sensei's attention to us.

"Hey you guys! How's Kakashi doing?"

"You know Kakashi?" I can't help it.

"Know him?" he laughed a creepy satisfied laugh.

A couple of seconds passed, Rock Lee's sensei is still standingâ€"and then suddenly he disappeared.

"People refer to us as 'Eternal Rivals'" He appeared behind us.

"Fifty wins, forty nine losses."

He winked, flashed us a smileâ€"with shiny teeth and allâ€"and does a thumb up at us.

"I'm stronger than Kakashi."

I don't feel all that frightened, somehowâ€"even though it may be true that this guy's stronger than Kakashi, but it's not like Kakashi's the strongest ninjaâ€"it only make me feel stupidly discouraged, because he and Kakashi and Haku and Zabuza all speak to my nonexistent skill.

"Sasuke-kun, the truth is I came here to test my abilities."

"I lied beforeâ€"most likely, the strongest leaf genin is on my teamâ€| I've entered this to defeat him, and you're also one of my targets."

He jumped away. "Be prepared during the exam!"

Sasuke looked really taken at thatâ€|

"Hey, let's just ask Kakashiâ€"

"The Uchiha name ain't worth much these days." Highly sensitive approach, Narutoâ€|

"You saw his hand, tooâ€|"

"That thick-brow must have trained really hard every dayâ€|more than you. That's all it is." Naruto's trying to cheer Sasukeâ€|I guess boys have that unseemingly connection about these thingsâ€|well, it's not like I've tried to understand themâ€|maybeâ€"maybe I'm the one who lacked sensitivity after all.

I mean I knew Sasuke's the sole survivor to a traumatic massacre and Naruto's been ostracized for as long as I know himâ€|but I never reach out.

"Naruto, you too train hard in this chuunin exam." I offer both of them a smile.

Sasuke smirked. "Yeah, this thing is getting fun, this chuunin exam."

"You guys ready? Naruto, Sakura."

"Hell yeah!"

* * *

><p>Part 2: First Test

* * *

><p>"Sasuke-kun," Ino glomp at Sasuke's back, "you're late!" she said cheekily and got off.<p>

"Sakura, you better not be holding him back!" She grinned.

"Like hell I would, Ino-pig!" We did a high five; I knew Shikamaru will say itâ€"

"Troublesome."â€"there it is!

We were joined by team ten and eightâ€"consists of Inuzuka Kiba, Hyuga Hinata and Aburame Shinoâ€"and I was suddenly aware that they're all from clans, safe for Naruto and Iâ€"is it because of that that we're being put on a team with Sasuke?

I was worrying if I'm really credible to join in the exam and if I'm actually the weakest ninja in the whole room as a grey-haired guy named Yakushi Kabuto shows around his nin info card.

"Do you have cards with info on individuals?" Sasuke asked.

"Of course, even though it isn't perfectâ€"I even have info on you

guys."

"Gaara of Sunagakure and Rock Lee from Konoha."

"Ok, first is Rock Lee, a year older than you. Completed twenty D-rank and twelve C-rank. His sensei is Guy. His taijutsu is great, but the rest is nothing impressive. On his team are Hyuga Neji and Ten ten. Next is Gaara of Sand. Mission history: eight C-rank and one B-rankâ€"impressive for a geninâ€"and he seems to have returned from all of his missions without even a scratch."

This isn't going to be easy, but this exam is a good place for gaining experience, and I can't back down without Sasuke and even Naruto killing me, anywayâ€|

And it turns out the first test is written examâ€"which is totally advantageous for me.

And then scary proctorâ€"Ibiki Morinoâ€"announced that it's not individual, but a team's testâ€"which is totally not good. I'm on the same team with Naruto!

One wrong and one point will be subtracted and caught cheating two points will be subtractedâ€|I hope Naruto's okay with it.

_But why didn't they just disqualify cheaters? _This is a big test for determining which of us will be promoted to chuunin, surely if what's the proctor said is true, they wouldn't want cheaters to gain promotion, right? But they only subtracted two points instead of failing them on the spot, why is that?

It's really suspiciousâ€"and the questions are crazyâ€|they are complicated and requires a high amount of by the book knowledge and experience. With Naruto and Sasukeâ€"both of whom are not a book smart person, whatsoeverâ€"this will be impossible. Plus, as rookies, we're not that experienced. And say, if they only allow ten out of fifty one teams to pass, then each individual have to score a high pointâ€|being ninja is not all about these questionsâ€"this is a system that encourages cheating, no doubt. Hopefully Sasuke and Naruto realize this.

I did all nine questionsâ€"the tenth will be announced by the proctorâ€"I'm one of the rare book smart nerdâ€"I know I will be one of the prize for cheaters and I hope Sasuke or Naruto will be smart enough and benefited from itâ€"like Ino just nowâ€"that sly girl, good thing you got that mind jutsu on your back.

"Ok, now, we will begin the tenth question," said the proctor.

"There are two additional rules to this question."

"One, if a person decided not to take the tenth question, that person and the rest of the team will be disqualified but they can try again next year and second, if you decided to take the tenth question and answer it incorrectly, then you are forbidden to ever take the chuunin exam again."

I know I should just trust Naruto and Sasukeâ€|but I'm totally not confident about Narutoâ€| He always said he wanted to be a ninja, and

Hokage, but if he's a genin forever!"

Should I give up, after all?

But, then what?

Shit, that's Naruto raising his hand!"I don't know if I should be relieved or worry!"and jammed it back to his desk.

"DON'T UNDERESTIMATE ME!"

"I'LL TAKE IT! Even if I'm genin forever! I'll will myself to becoming Hokage anyway, so I don't care! I'm not afraid!"

He startled me.

Yeah, he's that kind of idiot. I'm so proud of him.

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><p>Part 3: The Forest of Death

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><p>"Welcome to the stage for the second test, practice arena forty-four." Mitarashi Anko, our second test proctor announced.<p>

"Also known as 'The Forest of Death'"

The second test is a free battle and survival test. We get inside the forest"where lurks creatures and dangerous ninjas alike"and fight to get two type of scroll" "Heaven" and "Earth"one scroll, in our case Heaven scroll"Sasuke got it"already in our possession"then we protect it until we get to the center tower before five days passed.

After getting inside the forest and running for a while, Naruto went to piss.

And a rain ninja came disguising as Naruto.

I pinned him down, kunai on his throat. "Amateur."

I jaw punched him"knocking him out"and turned to Sasuke. "What should we do with him?"

He takes a while before replying, "Tie him. Let's look for Naruto."

"I'm here!" Naruto came running at us.

Sasuke created a password, just in case we got separated and things like this happened again. The password is kind of too long for Naruto to remember but before I can say anything, there's an explosion from behind and we all move away.

Sasuke came to me and I ask him the password which he answers correctly and then Naruto came and he also recite the password, it hasn't been too long, I think, but Sasuke attacks him. And it turns

out he's the long-tongued grass ninja who gives me a creepy impression from the start of the exam.

Heâ€"or sheâ€"swallows their own Earth scroll and attacks in a motion I can't catch with my eyes and suddenly a kunai have embedded itself into my frontal skull. I feel neither pain nor shock, just a blinding fear.

Suddenly Sasuke whisked me away in his arms, no kunai on my head or his.

I get a chance to calm myself down while Sasuke seems rigid and on watch, he continues to look behind the tree where we're hiding.

I touched his hands. "Snake."

We both jumped away as a big snake lunged to eat us. The snake aim for Sasuke and he killed himâ€"and the grass-nin came out of the snake.

Shurikens are fired to the snake-nin from behind me. I turned.

"Sorry guys, I forgot the password." I feel gladâ€"it's Narutoâ€"but Sasuke seems getting more panic by the minute.

He turned off his Sharingan and said words that I thought he will never say.

"I will give you the scrollâ€|please, take it and leave us."

"WHAT?! Sasuke what the hell are you talking about?! Why would you give the scroll to the enemy?!"

Sasuke pay no heed to Naruto's question. He tossed our scroll to the grass ninjaâ€"but Naruto intercept and punched Sasuke in the face. I went and catch Sasuke.

"I forgot the password so I can't test itâ€|but you're Sasuke's fake aren't you!?"

"Sasukeâ€| "

"You moron! I'm the real Sasuke!"

"LIAR! There's no way such a stupid coward like you is the Sasuke I know!"

The grass ninja made a move andâ€"it's stupid and suicidalâ€"I lunged at him, chakra strings in all ten fingers firing shurikens.

"NO! SAKURA, GET AWAY!"

"Kuchiyose no Jutsu!"

I got away in time before the giant snake summon blast me off with its head.

"NARUTO!" I heard Sasuke screamed.

I turned around, Naruto's falling and the grass ninja command its snake. "Go ahead and eat him."

I tried using my chakra thread to retrieve Naruto, but it died as Naruto release a great surge of angry chakra. He managed to get away from the snake with a huge amount of powerâ€"the grass ninja attack him usingâ€"my guess, a poisonous gasâ€"and Naruto fell.

The grass nin lunged for Sasuke this time and without thinking, I placed myself in front of him, kunai blade at hand and I release my chakra, ready to fire every weapon I've got once the snake opened its mouthâ€"only on the last moment, Naruto stop the snake with only his body. "Naruto!"

Naruto got lift by the grass nin. "So the Kyuubi brat is still alive?" Before I can act, he slammed his palm in Naruto's stomach and threw him down.

I retrieve him this timeâ€"though it doesn't cease my worry. I checked his pulseâ€"at least he's alive.

The snake lunged at us again and this time I got its eyes and I made them mad.

"YOU! I'll kill you first!" the grass nin got off the snake and Naruto's heavy on my back, I wouldn't be able to dodge him in time.

I DIDN'T WANT TO DIE.

I prepared my chakra arena and Sasuke saved me.

He battled the grass nin the way he always did. Planned but fearless. He uses the Sharingan effectively, making traps and aiming right from places I couldn't think. He uses the fire jutsu and I thought it burned the grass nin faceâ€"but he changed face, right as he's looking at us.

"My name's Orochimaru. If you want to see me again, then survive and pass this examâ€|"

His head lunged at Sasuke fast, his neck sweeping through the ten meters distance. I threw Naruto to the ground but I still couldn't stop him.

Sasuke's on his feet and I saw three-fold tomoe mark on his neck where Orochimaru bit him.

I watched him let out a long-suffering howlâ€"wishing with all my heart I knew some healing ninjutsuâ€"I grabbed both of his hands and he squeeze them hard it hurtsâ€"and then he blacked out.

I tear my shirt hem and use it to attach Naruto to my back. Then I picked Sasuke and search for a hiding place. I gather food and eat to replenish my chakra and then I set up traps. I had three short sleeps while sitting, all the while holding Naruto and Sasuke's hands as if to give me strength.

The third time I woke up, I noticed three foreign chakra from a few meters away. They're enemies. Everyone's an enemy right now.

I fired off kunai at them and they all move away. "Heh, girl, kiss your Sasuke awake, we want to fight him," said the one on the middle.

I stand my ground, feeling bigger than anything, my voice shake as I said intensely, "whether it's you three or that Orochimaru guy, if you want to take my teammate, you'd have to see me dead first." It pissed them.

"Let's kill the girl!" They lunged and I set off my first trapâ€"a giant tree lodge from aboveâ€"they destroy it in pieces with unknown force but it sets off my explosive tags. It caught them off guard.

"Shit!" They scattered away and the girl got caught in one of my trap hole.

I braced myself in a millisecond and using my long ranged chakra string, embedded a kunai with an explosive tag to the girl's head.

"Kin! Get back here!"

I didn't take my eyes off the guy in front of me as the other one ran to the hole.

"Zaku, don't go there!"â€"Zaku stopped, I attach my chakra string and pushed him into the hole and detonate the tag.

"Looks like you're quite a planner; I couldn't even sense the traps. But I see nowâ€|these mine fields is coated with your chakra."

"Zaku, do it!"

"What?!" I thought he's deadâ€"he must've use a substitution jutsu.

Zaku slammed his hands to the ground andâ€"I feel it with my chakraâ€"racked and soften the ground, setting off all the traps I've laid inside.

I pulled back to protect myself from some of the explosions. The dust obscuring my vision. _If I grabbed Naruto and Sasuke and ran for it_â€"no time for that though, because suddenly Zaku appeared in front of meâ€"I jumped back reflectively, firing shurikens but he blast it off using air pressure on his handsâ€"the one he used detonating all my traps.

I feel a hard blow to my back, the shock came first and the blood from my mouth and then the pain. He kicked me down again and I fell, my whole front body colliding with the ground hard. I try to get up fast despite the pain, and the guy from behind tread on my right leg hard. I feel the crack of my skull and I screamed, tears already in my eyes.

I almost faint from the painâ€"but out of the corner of my eyes I saw Zaku heading for Sasuke. I gritted my teeth, sending more force to the chakra string and caught Zaku's hand, pulling him back to a tree

hard.

"You're not easy to kill, are you?" and I was certain he'd kill me, if not for Rock Lee kicking him away.

I crawled away, experiencing more pain than I ever remember in my two lifetimes.

"Sakura-san, I'm sorry to come so late!"

I can barely groan a reply. "It'sâ€œ|oâ€œ"kay," I managed to breathe out. I have trouble focusing my vision because of the pain. I've got trouble even to calm my breathing. My chakra nearly completely drained because of the mine field and my heart ached for the safety of facing Sasuke and Naruto's back. I started to cry but I stopped it. I wouldn't forgive myself for being weak.

I managed a sitting positionâ€œ"with tree root supporting my back, and trying to regain my focus. All still looked blurry but I can see that Lee's in trouble. He seemed to be in pain and his right ear is streaming blood.

Zaku's making his way towards meâ€œ"towards Sasuke and Narutoâ€œ"while behind him, Lee slumped into the ground after letting out a painful scream.

My heart sank into the groundâ€œ"and then in front of me, stood Shikamaru and Choji, their backs facing me.

I turned and Ino's beside me, her face crumpling as she holds back tears.

Shikamaru have the guy who beats Lee by his shadow and Choji is fighting Zaku, only Zaku's more powerful and Choji have to pull backâ€œ"during this time, Lee's team, Hyuga Neji and Ten ten came out and a surge of dark chakra is emitting from my behind.

I couldn't turn my body but Ino can. "Sasuke-kun, you'reâ€œ|awake."

I looked up to my left and saw Sasuke, covered by dark marks all from his left hands all the way to his neck.

"Sakuraâ€œ|whoâ€œ| did that to you?"

"Saâ€œ"Sasukeâ€œ| "

"Who is it?" He demanded.

"It was me!" Zaku boasted.

Sasuke bared his teeth and the marks expanding. I looked at him, feeling actually frightened at him for the first time.

Suddenly I was whisked away to the clearing, Naruto's sleeping beside me and seconds later, Ino and Shikamaru holding Choji went beside me.

Sasuke fights unreasonably faster and stronger than before and I knew it was the marks, the blasted three fold tomoe mark from where Orochimaru bit him.

He easily breaks both of Zaku's arms and is stalking closer to the only guy left, an evil smile stretching across his mouth. Crazy is on his face.

I screamed his name, limping into him and hold him from behind.

"Stopâ€|pleaseâ€|"

Maybe it's because I screamed his name or maybe it's because I fell into him after that, but he stopped and the marks subsided.

I see black after that.

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><p>Part 4: Preliminary

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><p>I woke up feeling so much better but confused.<p>

For one, I woke up on a bed, my clothes have changed to a rather boyish one and there's no one in the room. I examine my leg and there are no bruises so I jumped off the bed, making my way outside.

A blur of orange and purple and Naruto and Ino crashed into me and proceed to declare that they wouldn't let me go for the remainder of the dayâ€"it's the fourth day, by the way, so I've been unconscious for two days, I feel so weakâ€"Naruto fill me up on the details after I blacked outâ€"both Sasuke and Naruto take turn to piggyback me, and they got help from the Kabuto guy and they hurried their asses off to get the scroll and get to the tower so I can receive medical attention.

"That's good; your legs are fine nowâ€|you've got a really nasty bruise two days ago, and I keep panicking and Sasuke's worrying whether they got infected." Naruto said after Ino's gone.

Naruto smile sadly. "I keep thinking what if you can't ever walk again and it's all our fault for leaving you aloneâ€|"

He looked at me seriously. "Don't ever blacked out on us again, Sakura-chan."

I feel a twinge of guilt; suddenly I realize how lonely Naruto is.

"I won't, hopefully." I managed a weak smile.

I asked him where Sasuke is.

"Sasuke's with Kakashi-sensei." A minimum tinge of jealousy in his tone, "Haven't seen him since yesterday night after we got hereâ€"oh there he is! Teme!" Naruto waved his hands.

I hear his footsteps and turned back. "Hey, thanks for getting me here, Naruto too."

He seemed tired but he managed the usual cocky smirk. "So you've wake up? Your leg's fine?"

"Yeah, nothing I can't handle."

I grabbed both of their hands. "Come on, you two, I've got to know how you managed to survive each other. Something steamy must've happened."

I laughed looking at their expression.

The next day we are all assembled in front of the Hokage and all jounin instructorsâ€"I waved at Kaka-sensei and he smiled his usual smile. Beside him is Gai. I suppose they are rivals after all.

We were told about the purposes of the chuunin exam by the Hokage and it was then I realize; I've made my first kill. I don't even know her name, but she's not here, and so the rest of her team; Zaku and the other boy.

For a second, I feel a powerful urge to throw up. Sasuke seems to realize this but he didn't say a word, his hands unclenching and made its way to mine. I feel sick and horrible. I need reassurance from Kakashi-sensei or any respected adultsâ€"I did it to protect my teammates, it's self-defense, it's a mistakeâ€"but it's notâ€"and I knew hearing them would be pointless, nothing can un-done it, and they wouldn't give me anything that can make me feel less dirty. They will give me nothing but the truthâ€"it isn't necessary, I should just man up and swallow it now.

I told Sasuke that I'm okay and he lets go.

Our referee, Gekko Hayate explain the rules of this preliminary, which purpose is to lessen the participants for the real third test, for the fear the tournament will take too long for the spectators. The eight winner of this preliminary round will advance to the final a month from now.

Also, this extra round is a one on one battle, no rules, and it continues until one is dead, knocked out, or admits defeat.

They made it seems like killing is normalâ€|and I knew that being a ninja is like that, but I guess I've been living as Camilla, the normal school girl longer than I've been Haruno Sakura, the ninja of Konohagakure.

The proctor presents to us an electric board that will announce the two names that will be fighting against each other.

I crossed my fingers, wishing for luck, but even then I already have that sinking feeling, like a disaster sixth sense, as Gekko Hayate call out my name.

"The two participants in the first fight are Haruno Sakura and Akado Yoroi." I bowed my head; Akado Yoroi didn't reciprocate the gesture. "Are you ready?"

"Okay." I said, more to myself than anything.

"Everyone except the two participants move to the upper level." The

proctor announced.

"Sakura-chan, go beat that guy's ass!" Naruto cheered.

"You can do it Sakura!" Ino also followed.

I hear some other cheers for me; it did take a little pressure off my back.

"Now, "the cheers died down, "Please begin."

Akado Yoroi smirked and fired off shurikens. I stop all three mid-flights, to which I hear some gasps, and fired them back at him, he dodge but I didn't let lose my control of the shurikens. I control them like whips and in one fast movement caught Akado Yoroi to the ground.

I jumped at him, holding kunai at the base of his throat. "Do you want to forfeit?" I asked, restraining myself from smirking, I know it will blow his guy pride.

Naruto and Ino cheered from above.

Akado Yoroi frees his right hand from my shuriken with force, tearing his shirt in the process, and grab at me while I let go of my kunai and punch him, which he blocked. I feel my strength leaving me and he threw me off, my back collides with the ground.

I feel dizzy when I got up, but Akado Yoroi won't give me the chance to rest. He lunged at me, I stab him with my shurikens, drawing blood, but he doesn't stop. He pounced and grabbed my face harshly. I feel like I'm going to die, my chakra strings are gone. If he absorbs my chakra, then it's going to be soon before he drained me completely, my reserve being this small.

I lay still and close my eyesâ€"to make him relaxâ€"and proceed to knee him hard in the groin, as hard as not caring if he loses his potential to procreate. It's my first time thinking like that. I guess it is survival instinct overcoming my common sense.

Before Akado Yoroi fell into the ground completely, as a precautionâ€"ninja, who knows?â€"I punch his jaw hard, sending him across the room.

Seeing his unmoving body and the shocked faces of my friends, I begin thinking that maybe it's not just survival instinct. Maybe I'm just a little sadistic.

"He absorbs my chakra, I have to do it." I said defensively to no one in particular, making things more awkward.

Gekko Hayate coughed. "The winner of the first match, Haruno Sakura has passed the prelims." He didn't even go to check on Yoroi first.

I smiled a little at him before I slumped, my strength all disappearing from me.

For a moment I'm debating what's more embarrassing; crawling my way upstairs or asking for Naruto's help, but then Kaka-sensei appeared,

still reading that orange pervy book of his, lifting me up like a sack and transporting me to Naruto's waiting hands.

"He absorbs my chakra!" I explained.

Naruto, for once, looks like he is unsure of what to say. "Erm, it's a good fight, Sakura-chan. Anyway, congrats on making it to the final! Me and teme will advance too, 'ttebayo!"

He looked contemplating for a second. "Well that is if he didn't get to face me."

Sasuke scoffed at that.

Naruto let out a barrage of angry insults before suddenly his expression turn cocky. "But I'd like to fight you, teme!"

Sasuke also smirked. "I'm looking forward to that too, dobe."

Turns out their wish to fight each other are not heard, because Sasuke will be fighting Aburame Shino in the impending match.

I wished him for a good performance when I noticed it. The three-fold tomoe mark on Sasuke's neck now has small weird symbols circling it.

Aburame Shino turns out to be a very powerful opponent, even for Sasuke. At first Sasuke seem to be at easy, only using Taijutsu and hitting his opponent multiple times--he's not that much of a Taijutsu fighter--but Shino uses bugs in a weird technique and managed to recover from Sasuke's attacks. Sasuke uses his Sharingan but Shino--like Lee--didn't use a technique where Sasuke can have an advantage with his dojutsu. He uses an army of bugs to eat Sasuke's chakra, but Naruto insult--err, rudely encourage Sasuke and he managed to uses his fire jutsu to hold the bugs at bay and though still with some bugs on his body, did a creative impersonate of Lee's lotus technique.

He finished Shino off with a hard kick that sent Shino to the ground, possibly breaking some of his bone, until the floor cracked from the impact. The proctor announces Sasuke wins and call on the medic team to carry Shino out of the room.

Even after getting his chakra eaten by the bugs, Sasuke's footing is steady as he approaches us. He seems out of breath but smirked all the same. "Now it's only you, dobe." He greets Naruto.

"Tch! don't worry about me, I'll make sure to meet you at the final, believe it!"

The next fight is Shikamaru against Tsurugi Misumi, Kabuto and Yoroi's teammate. It took a while but Shikamaru won the match, the lazy guy actually work his heavily wrinkled brain to advance to the final, leaving Tsurugi Misumi a rather humiliating defeat by banging his own head to the wall.

After that Temari defeated Ino in one blow of her fan--scary--and then there's a rather disturbing and revealing fight between Neji and Hinata, during which all people can't help but be angry at Neji to some degree. Naruto, especially. He vowed to defeat Neji in final,

since Neji won.

As much as I don't want to get into a fight with Neji, I'd rather have him as oppose to Sasuke or Narutoâ€"who won a fight with Kibaâ€"a result Sasuke seemed to show no surprise. I think, by this time, no one understands Naruto better than Sasuke and it work both ways.

Kankuro defeated Choji and after that he managed to also defeat Ten ten.

After Kankuro's fights, there's Lee vs. Gaara, which is horribleâ€"horrible enough that I'd rather take on both Sasuke and Naruto at the same time rather than having to fight Gaara.

Lee managed to continue surprising us but it seems to add up to Gaara's apparentâ€|mental instability. I bit my lip, really fearing for Lee's safety. There hasn't been a kill, but with an opponent like Gaaraâ€|and I've only just begun to like Lee as a precious friendâ€|

"LEE-SAN! YOU CAN'T DIE, OKAY?!" I hollered, surprising everyone.

"YEAH, LEE! FIGHT ME IN THE FINAL!" Naruto followed.

He opened the fifth gate of the eight celestial gates, it is apparently a dangerous decision since Kakashi-sensei even stating that he lost respect for Gai-senseiâ€"who's right beside meâ€"for teaching his student the technique.

I thought Lee is going to win after he, with speed I can't comprehend, land numerous attacks on Gaara while on air that his armor of sand is coming off.

Lee kick Gaara to the ground as a finishing move that should've end the battle but on the last millisecond Gaara turned his gourd into sand to cushioned his fall and managed to take hold of Lee's left leg and arm, crushing them with his sand coffinâ€"a terrible technique.

Gai-sensei jumped in front of Lee, declaring the match over as Gaara the winner, preventing him from truly killing Lee.

Gaara act as if he can't comprehend why Gai even interfere with the matchâ€"and seeing his expression I keep thinking_ what kind of monster has Suna raisedâ€|

Silence followed as Lee is being carried off by medics until Gekko Hayate announced the conclusion of the prelims.

Eight participants will advanced to the finals; they are six from Konoha and two from Sand.

We all draw out numbers from a box Mitarashi Anko hand out.

I get number two.

Number one's Kankuro. Number three until eight in order are: Neji, Naruto, Temari, Shikamaru, Sasuke and Gaara.

The fights in order will be: Inuzuka Kiba vs. Haruno Sakura, Hyuga Neji vs. Uzumaki Naruto, Temari vs. Nara Shikamaru, and lastly Uchiha Sasuke vs. Gaara.

After that winner of me and Kankuro fight will be fighting against the winner from Naruto and Neji fight, and the winner from the match Temari and Shikamaru will be fighting against either Sasuke or Gaara.

End
file.